

# **BUILDING A BETTER NEW JERSEY:** *Transforming New Jersey's Public Schools*



**New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation  
2002-2004 Progress Report  
to Governor James E. McGreevey**

**September 28, 2004**



## ***Introduction: A Call to Action***

In 2002, Governor James E. McGreevey created the New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation (SCC) to expedite the implementation of the New Jersey Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act of 2000. The SCC was formally established in October of 2002.

The SCC is charged with the responsibility of overseeing and/or providing funding assistance for the construction and revitalization of educational facilities in urban and suburban public school districts. To accomplish this goal, the SCC works closely with New Jersey's local communities to carry out its mission, ensuring that all students are afforded the opportunity to obtain a thorough and efficient education through the planning and construction of 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools.

As the 2004 school year began, students returned to a number of new schools completely designed and built under the SCC's construction program. For high school students in Barnegat Township, this meant that this year's freshmen are going to school in that district's first new high school in more than two generations. For young learners in the City of Orange, this meant the opening of the new Main Street K-8 Elementary School, which includes community features that allow public access to the media centers and other areas after hours, so that parents and other Orange residents can learn in the same environment their children do. And for the children of the City of Paterson, a partnership with NASA has resulted in the launch of PANTHER Academy, a new state-of-the-art science academy complete with planetarium, which will be an invaluable instructional resource for the children and the greater Paterson community.

## ***Investing in the Future***

Throughout New Jersey, the schools construction program is doing more than ever before to provide students with a quality learning environment. Whether constructing a new school, or making health, safety and other improvements to an existing structure, all of New Jersey's public school districts can look to SCC for assistance.

The New Jersey Supreme Court's decision in *Abbott v. Burke* ordered the financing of school construction and reconstruction to enable public school students in districts in greatest need of assistance to obtain first-rate facilities for their education. Known as *Abbott* districts, these public school districts are entitled to full state funding for eligible costs of school construction projects. Non-Abbott grant districts receive a minimum of 40% of the eligible costs of school construction or renovation projects in the form of state grants.

The \$8.6 billion school construction program provides \$6 billion for use on Abbott District projects, \$2.5 billion for use on non-Abbott district projects, and \$100 million for use on county vocational schools.

## ***Improving Education, the Economy and Quality of Life***

Educating our children is one of the highest priorities of the State of New Jersey and our nation. The SCC's mission is simple: We are building 21<sup>ST</sup> Century Schools for 21<sup>ST</sup> Century leaders. The investments we are making will strengthen communities, our economy and the quality of life for our families for years to come.

Good schools are critical to developing a well-educated workforce that can compete for the best jobs. We are working harder than ever to ensure every child can thrive in a safe, healthy and high-quality learning environment. The program provides other benefits to our state, including direct property tax relief, acting as a large economic stimulus to various sectors of our economy and creating living-wage jobs so individuals can raise families and provide them with health care.

For two years after the passage of the Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act of 2000, the school construction program was mired in red tape and bogged down with little to no progress. Since Governor McGreevey created the SCC in October of 2002 to accelerate the building of schools, we have: streamlined the delivery of schools, strengthened partnerships with local school districts, supported environmentally-sound designs, focused on schools as centers of communities, and providing property tax relief.

The 2004-2005 school year saw students return to school in new facilities, for all grade levels, all over the state where the SCC has managed construction. Brand new Early Childhood Centers in Garfield, Neptune, Gloucester City, Perth Amboy, Elizabeth and Bridgeton opened their doors for 3-4 year olds. Elementary school students are taking their first classes in state-of-the-art facilities in Orange, Passaic, Trenton, Asbury Park, and Manchester, as are middle school students in districts like Union City and West New York. High school students in Barnegat, East Orange, Paterson, and Jersey City will be able to prepare for college and the workforce in facilities that incorporate community needs, the newest technologies, and enhanced educational resources.

## ***Conclusion***

As the largest school construction program in state history, the SCC takes very seriously its mission to provide safe, cost efficient, and state-of-the-art schools for New Jersey's children.

Looking to the future, the SCC is moving forward to having another successful year in 2005. Approximately 30 new schools are projected to be complete in 2005. We at the SCC realize that there is much more work to be done—and we look forward to working with all of partners to meeting this challenge for our children, and their future.

## ***NJSCC: Two Years of Results***

Progress over the past two years includes new school construction projects, school-based community revitalization efforts and enhanced employment opportunities. Some highlights include:

**2500 School Projects Underway**– The SCC has committed support to 2500 school projects throughout New Jersey for new additions, renovation, health and safety work, and new construction. Since 2002, the SCC has overseen the design and construction in nearly 400 schools in the Abbott districts.

**Opening 50 New Schools Program-Wide**- The SCC is anticipating the opening of approximately 50 schools all over New Jersey by the close of 2004. Twenty-three of these new schools are located within the Abbott districts.

**Over 350 Health and Safety Projects Completed** – By the beginning of the 2004 school year, the SCC had performed \$660 million worth of health and safety repairs at more than 350 schools to address the immediate needs of existing schools in Abbott districts. These projects included repairs like roof replacements and fire alarm upgrades.

**940 Early Childhood Classrooms** – The SCC is creating 940 classrooms to house over 14,000 early childhood students. Forty percent of schools designed by the SCC to date include early childhood space. Thus far, eight buildings with early childhood space have opened.

### **\$5.7 Billion Committed Program-Wide**

**\$3.7 Billion** – Committed for the design and construction of school projects in Abbott districts, including Demonstration Projects.

**\$1.9 Billion in Support for Non-Abbott Districts** - Throughout the State's 21 counties, the SCC provided grants to 417 districts receiving less than 55% of their budget in state aid. Of the \$6.3 billion in total project costs, the State contributed \$1.9 billion, providing direct property tax relief for families in these communities. Every dollar of support by the State has meant that one less dollar has needed to come out of the pockets of local residents.

### **\$100 Million in Support of County Vocational Schools**

**More Than \$500 Million to Support Six School-Based Community Initiatives** – In partnership with local communities, the SCC is supporting “demonstration projects” in Union City, Trenton, Vineland, New Brunswick, Camden and East Orange. These schools are designed to be catalysts for community revitalization.

**Creating New Business Opportunities** – SCC established programs for small, women- and minority-owned businesses to participate in the school construction program. These services include contractor training programs for women and minorities, surety bonding and working capital programs to help small businesses get the financial backing they need to compete for larger school construction projects, and a new program, which carves out contracting opportunities solely available for small businesses and provides those businesses with additional opportunities to participate in the schools construction effort.

**Workforce Development** – With NJ Department of Labor, SCC created a construction-training program for individuals in the cities where new schools are being built.